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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the place of oral heritage in France. The first section provides an overview of oral collections in France from the early 1900s to the present. The study of oral materials is then discussed in the second section, including: research centers within universities or high schools; activities of the Ministry of Culture; development of a network of museums; the role of associations; the Metive associative network, comprising a museum, a hall, sound and audiovisual studios, exhibition, training and meeting rooms, and a center of research and documentation on orality; and the Datsum association, focusing on the oral traditions and music of Bretagne. The third section addresses orality in the library, including public library collections, legal aspects, and collections of the audiovisual department of the national library. (MES)

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Collecting, making known, and preserving oral heritage in a written civilization : a challenge for libraries

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Paper

Through, in an african civilization where orality is essential, the writer Hampaté Bâ said "When an old man die, a library is burning", this idea wasn't conceivable in France until recently. In the French society, memories are much more reliable when put down on paper. History especially was constructed upon a critical analysis on the oral tradition, opposed to the strength of the written materials. For a very long time, French culture, shaped by a state and centralizing civilization based on written matters, have hushed orality up. Why do libraries, temples of books, keep and present to the public oral documents in a civilization based on writting ? Let's try and understand the place of orality near written matters in France nowadays.

1. The birth of oral collections in France

Stammering in the 18th century, the study on orality became a scientific branch of learning ; later on, with the possibility of capturing human voice with sound recordings, sound materials joined written ones in libraries.

In 1911, the dream of "making human speech eternal" incited Ferdinand Brunot, as a linguist, to create the "Archives de la Parole" ("archives of speech")in his laboratory of the Sorbonne University. The aim was, for the first time in a French institution, to set up a sound heritage for linguistic study and research by collecting statements, folk tales, traditionnal music, folklore, etc. In the "Archives de la Parole", voices of famous people were also recorded, in a period when broadcast didn't exist. In 1927, the "Archives de la Parole" became the "Musée de la Parole et du Geste", which was extended to include recorded images. Its role were precise :

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collecting "speech of famous people, diction and singing of great artists, folk tunes, decaying dialects and patois". At the same time, electric recording gave a boost to the collecting work. In 1932, Mr Roger Dévigne was appointed Director of the Musée de la Parole. It was his constant preoccupation to enlarge his sound atlas by missions, studio recordings, exchanges, donations. He succeeded in creating a sound laboratory and a recording studio supplied with portable electric apparatus. With this studio it became possible to reproduce the records issued by the Musée de la Parole and above all to increase the collections recorded on acetate discs.

In 1930, a musical section in the Guimet Museum was created. In this section, you can find records on oral tradition (especially music) from all part of Asia. This section and the "Archives de la Parole" collaborated and published a series, called "La Bibliothèque musicale" (the musical library), of about ten records, between 1929 and 1932, on musics from all over the world.

In the "Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro", André Schaeffer, the famous musicologist and ethnomusicologist, created in 1929 a Organology Department ; in 1932, it became a Musical Ethnology Department with a sound archive. In 1937, the museum was renamed "Musée de l'Homme" (Museum of Mankind). This sound archives, born with Asian and Oceanian records, is now devoted to ethnomusicology of the non French world. Since 1935, selections of sound recordings have been published, nowadays under the label "CNRS-Musée de l'homme".

The "Musée des Arts et Traditions populaires" (folk arts and traditions museum) was created in 1937 from the French collections of the "Musée du Trocadéro" (Trocadéro ethnographic museum) ; the foreign collections of this museum were given to the "Musée de l'Homme" (Museum of Mankind). The birth of that museum expresses the acknowledgement and the institutionalization of the French ethnology. A chair of folklore was created in 1942 in the "Ecole du Louvre" (French high school of Arts) ; a research laboratory has been associated to the museum since 1945 and became the "Centre d'Ethnologie française" (French Ethnolgy Center) in 1966, by an agreement with the "C.N.R.S." ("Centre national pour la Recherche scientifique - French National Center for Scientific Research). The museum has a sound archive which preserves unpublished sound materials : interviews, collected ethnographical informations, oral literature (tales and relations), vocal and instrumental musics, and also discographic collections, broadcasts, and the collections of a Museum of Song.

The "Phonothèque Nationale" (national sound library) was set up on 8 April 1938 for the legal deposit of sound recordings (records, audiocassettes and tapes) and to collect all sound recordings of whatever nature, keeping on the collecting policy of the Musée de la Parole. The director Dévigne organized new expeditions to the French provinces. As for unpublished original records, the Phonothèque nationale was helping the researchers by lending tapes and recorders to them. Therefore, in 1976 an agreement with the C.N.R.S. (Linguistics and Musicology Department) was signed, that allowed the researchers on linguistics and musicology to give their tapes to these archives. There are also agreements with researchers who are working for other institutions or for their own. These ethnographic, ethnomusicologic and linguistic documents are shaped in interviews and songs. However, in the 1980's, this source almost completely dried up.

In 1977, the "Phonothèque Nationale" was incorporated into the "Bibliothèque nationale" and became its Sound Archives and Audiovisual department. Since 1975,this department has been the legal depositary for video recordings and multimedia productions. With the birth of the "Bibliothèque nationale de France", the name became "Audiovisual department".

2. The oral heritage as a matter to study

Studying oral materials is now a fully-recognized science in linguistics and ethnology, and much more recently, in oral history.

Research centers develop in universities or high schools ("Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes",

"Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences sociales"), as, for instance, the "Centre de Recherches méditerranéennes sur les Ethnotextes, l'Histoire orale et les Parlers régionaux" (C.R.E.H.O.P. - Mediterranean Research Center on Ethnotexts, Oral History and Regional Dialects) related to the Université de Provence. In the musical and sociolinguistical fields, the "C.N.R.S." plays an important role with its research units and linguistic or ethnological programmes. For instance, the "C.N.R.S.", in a continuation of the making of the Linguistic Atlas of France published between 1902 and 1910, created a coordonated research group on linguistic atlases and regional cultures and dialects in France (called G.R.E.C.O.) in 1977.

Within the Ministry of Culture, the "Mission du Patrimoine ethnologique" (Mission on Ethnologic Heritage) was set up in 1980. Right from the start, the "Mission du Patrimoine ethnologique" and the "Conseil du Patrimoine ethnologique" decided to gather their activities under four headings: research, training, publishing and making available research findings.

A denser and denser network of museums has been created. Aimed to keep the memory of a place, of a language, of a profession, of a skill or of an everyday object, they also have collected sound materials, using their staff or with the help of voluntary organizations. If the great interest of oral traditions for linguistics or ethnology has been understood early, it's only recently that the oral statements have taken an historic value. Since the 80's, national, regional or military archives, that had received sound materials since 1960's, has begun to develop sound archives using oral statements with an historical aim.

In the field of oral traditions, associations are now playing an important role. A federation called "Fédération des Associations de Musiques et Danses Traditionnelles" (F.A.M.D.T. - Federation of Associations of Traditionnal Music and Dance) was born in 1985 from the gathering of the associations that were participating to a consultative committee on traditional musics created by the Direction of Music and Dance of the Ministry of Culture. It brings together researchers within a network and organize research- workshops on ethnomusicology ; it is active on starting and continuing training ; it works for the standardization of descriptions of archives and documents and publishes guidelines for documentation centers. The F.A.M.D.T. brings together big regional associations like "Dastum" (Bretagne), "Métive" (Poitou-Charente), the "Conservatoire occitan" (Toulouse), etc. The "Conservatoire occitan", created in 1970, is a place where you can find ressources about oral traditions, and especially about music, dance and traditionnal song. It puts at people's disposal a library, a photographic library, a sound and also audiovisual archive, with published and unpublished materials. It is working to raise its collections by its own collecting actions but sometimes receives materials collected by others researchers as well.

The associative network called "Métive" has covered the Poitou-Charentes area since 1972. It is composed by a municipal museum, a hall, sound and audiovisual studios, exhibition, training and congress rooms, and a center of research and documentation on Orality called "Maison des cultures" (House of cultures). It has done collecting campaign about language, music and dance, songs and tales, skills, etc. This centre preserves sound and audiovisual materials of the Poitou-Charentes and Vendée areas but also from others regions in France (Loire-Atlantique, Anjou, Mayenne, Bretagne) and others countries (Canada, Italy, North Africa).

The association called Dastum, created in 1972 and developped by a network of volunteers, local teams and others associations, gave itself the mission to collect, spread and emphazise the ethnological heritage of Bretagne, with a particular attention to the oral traditions and traditional musics. Its searches cover the "historical" Bretagne, that is to say including the Loire-Atlantique departement as well as the Breton communities disseminated in France outside this area. The materials collected by individuals or associations are opened to the public in a central library.

3. Orality in the library

With these sound archives of museums, these libraries of associations, having at their disposal collected sources, skills on documentary and technical matters to use them, what is the situation of traditional libraries ?

Public libraries sometimes have sound materials about oral traditions or literature in their local collections. By enriching their book collections with images and sound, they act as some specialized libraries, archives or museum. For example, the "Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon" received sound recordings made in its region "Rhône-Alpes", because of a special action, called "Archives vivantes et ethnotextes" (living archives and ethnotexts) organized by the "Musée des Arts et Traditions populaires" and the "C.N.R.S." between 1977 and 1981. Libraries connected with universities or research centers have the advantage of being close to the researchers. Let's also quote as an example the library of the University of Poitiers that keeps copies of recordings started twenty years ago by a local researcher (Michel Valière).

However, dealing with legal aspects (searching for researchers or entitled beneficiaries, writing agreements, etc.), having the good machines to read a lot of different carriers and formats (cylinders, direct cut discs, magnetic tapes, etc.) and trained to old and new carriers technicians and preserving documents in a different way from the paper are problems to solve when you want to develop unpublished materials. Digitilization allows to improve the access and that way to give better answers to the increasing needs of the users and to let the general public discover their oral heritage.

In the "Bibliothèque nationale de France", the collections of the Audiovisuel Department, inherited from the "Archives" then the "Musée de la Parole" and later from the "Phonothèque nationale", are still increasing by legal deposit. By legal deposit, the library can collect and preserve all the sound materials published or imported in France. In this way oral traditions from Africa, North and South America, West Indies, Middle East,Asia and Europe are well represented, with labels like Ocora, Unesco (Baerenreiter-musicaphon, Philips, Auvidis), Musée de l'Homme, Musiques du monde, BAM, Chant du monde among others.

The Audiovisual Department, taking the opportunity of the transfer of the collections to a new building, has undertaken to give more access to its collections but also to other collections, often ignored by the public or with a difficult access, and to cooperate with other institutions to report their collections. The patrimonial collection inherited from the national sound library will be expanded with the major acquisition programs currently under way, which mainly involve unpublished and hitherto rarely available material. Readers on the upper level will be able to consult an audiovisual collection made up for the most part with acquired audiovisual material and selected copies of patrimonial material. These include the most important works of reference in each discipline or genre. So far, such often unpublished material has not been readily available for consultation: as in the lower level collection, an open access collection of useful printed literature will be available. One of the trends used to select materials for the public is called "Observatory of France". Some broadcasts, TV shows, movies produced by associations, institutions presenting areas, people, statements in the 60's and the 70's are showing a portrait of France with constructed archives.

The "Bibliothèque nationale de France" has also undertaken to make its collections in connection with collections of others libraries. The Bibliothèque aims to be the hearth of a network of French libraries or others institutions (archives, institutes, etc.). The Audiovisual Department, aware of the restraint in dealing with such materials in a material, bibliographical, technical point of view, wants to share these matters with the different bodies in charge of sound archives in a cooperative way. In the field of oral tradition, a project has been made with the F.A.M.D.T., which will become a "pôle associé" (associated center). In this agreement, the "Bibliothèque nationale de France" will bring its skill in bibliographic standardization and the possibility to give access to some F.A.M.D.T. materials within the library. The collections chosen are for "Dastum" breton heritage, especially song and tale, for the Conservatoire occitan the occitan heritage, especially song and dance in the Gascogne, the Béran, The Languedoc occidental and the Lauragais, for "Métive" the heritage of the poitevin and

saintongeais areas and especially in the Poitou, in the Charente and in the Vendée and for the Mediterranean and Human Science House the Provençal heritage in music and oral tradition. According to the terms of the agreement, the bibliographical records of the sound materials that the "Bibliothèque nationale de France" will help to do will be in the "Catalogue collectif de France" (French Union Catalogue). The "Bibliothèque nationale de France" has implemented a major program aiming to produce a joint catalogue of all documents in French libraries. The aim of the French Union Catalogue is precisely to supply researchers with an integrated search system enabling them to identify, localize their documents. A selection of documents on oral traditions of each associations will be accessible within the "Bibliothèque nationale de France".

Audiovisual in public libraries has been developping a lot these last twenty years, due to more and more lendings of discs and videocassettes. On the other hand, the listening in the library with the aim of study or research is very limited.

The money needed to start and maintain the collections, the difficulty to re-use archives collected by other people, the management of legal obligations, the preservation of specific materials, etc. can only be managed by institutions having great documentary and technical infrastructures

However, we have to keep in mind that French people are finding a new interest in sound documents, concealed at other times by the interest for images. The Ministery of Culture helps make survey about the sound heritage. Publishers are willing again to publish oral materials. The people's taste for orality is keeping with a general movement of search for one's roots. Will the use of networks and of the web change the role of orality in the library ?

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